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PROFILE

U.S. Rep. John F. Tierney (D-Mass.)

CHAIRMAN, HOUSE OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

Staying Tough on Missile Defense

While the armed services and appropriations committees in the House and Senate are often the most well known vehicles for congressional oversight on the U.S. military, U.S. Rep. John F. Tierney believes the House Oversight and Government Reform national security and foreign affairs subcommittee he chairs can play a complementary role. That role, he says, is to ask questions that the other panels may not have had a chance to cover.

The subcommittee is particularly interested in nonproliferation, and held a series of hearings that included a May 23 session on whether the U.S. government's current space policy is playing an appropriate role in national security—particularly in regards to protecting satellites that could be threatened by weapons like the missile used by China during a Jan. 11 demonstration that destroyed an aging weather spacecraft.

Tierney has been a vocal critic of the Pentagon's work on national missile defense since his election to Congress in 1996. He feels that the Pentagon has not seen a level of testing success with the Ground Based Midcourse Defense System (GMD) that is commensurate with the level of funding invested. Twice he has introduced

legislation seeking to curb spending on new missile defense systems in an effort to improve the military's focus on GMD as well as efforts he thinks are more deserving.

Despite having a Democratic majority in this session of Congress that some may have assumed would be more sympathetic to his cause, Tierney's legislation failed in a vote on the House floor this year, just as it did in 2006. He attributes the defeat to members of Congress trying to avoid the label of being soft on defense as well as a lack of awareness about the details of the Missile Defense Agency's work.

Tierney also has criticized the Defense Department for stymieing missile defense oversight by inappropriately classifying information. While Tierney supports the concept of protecting sensitive national security information, he feels that the Pentagon has gone overboard on missile defense, especially in the instance where it retroactively classified a report from its chief weapons tester that already had been distributed widely following its release in 2000.

Tierney talked about space and missile defense issues during a June 12 interview with *Space News* staff writer Jeremy Singer.



SPACE NEWS PHOTO BY JAMES L. LEE

Do you think that the Air Force might be doing more to develop offensive counter-space systems than they acknowledge publicly?

Without impugning their integrity, I'd like to see exactly what's going on, so I have asked the Government Accountability Office to follow up on a variety of issues to give us more information about what is happening in the counter-space arena. I want to know what are the threats to U.S. satellites, how vulnerable our space assets are to those threats, and what the Pentagon is doing to address those threats, including whether they are making full use of diplomatic tools.

Would you like to see the U.S. government sign a treaty that bans anti-satellite weapons?

We should pursue diplomacy as much as possible. We stand to gain the most from this type of approach. Given how important satellites are both to the military and civilians in the United States, it doesn't make sense to invite people to do whatever they want by not engaging in discussions with them.

However, it's clear by this administration's actions over the past seven years that they don't put a lot of stock in international agreements. Their fall back seems to be that since treaties may not be 100 percent enforceable, they shouldn't engage in any of them.

Is it possible to enforce a treaty on space weapons?

Yes. You have to negotiate the terms and find a process of doing so. We have had nonproliferation agreements in the past that have worked very well. We may not necessarily find the ideal situation, but it's important to try to find the best agreement that we can.

What is your next step in military space oversight?

I'd like to review the Government Accountability Office's findings, and take a look at whether another hearing is in order, and who the appropriate witnesses

would be. That report will help provide a clearer picture on whether we are doing all that we can to protect our military and commercial satellites so that they will not be easy targets for other nations or terrorists.

Will the report be classified?

Our request is for an unclassified report, but it might be necessary to have both classified and unclassified versions.

You offered an amendment this year to terminate the Airborne Laser, Kinetic Energy Interceptor, Multiple Kill Vehicle and a European site for missile defense. What is your response to those who say that the United States will not be prepared for the threats of the future if it does not keep these programs on track?

Look at the history on this. We've been trying to do Star Wars since Ronald Reagan was the president. We've spent \$107 billion on missile defense and we have little to show for it. We're getting ahead of ourselves if we move forward with these other missile defense systems while GMD still hasn't been adequately tested. It will be a waste of time and money.

Why do you think your amendment did not succeed?

I'd like a head count on people who read the recent studies on missile defense from offices like the Government Accountability Office, Congressional Budget Office, Congressional Research Service, Defense Department inspector general, and Defense Department director of operational test and evaluation.

There's also a lot of pressure from the Pentagon and industry. They love this \$107 billion thing.

People are worried about being labeled as unpatriotic if they don't support missile defense, even if the evidence shows that the testing hasn't been realistic. It's unfortunate because there are a lot of other important priorities for homeland defense like protecting nuclear

power plants and railways, and as well as replacing equipment that has been damaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, that could benefit from some of the money being spent on missile defense.

That said, I was glad to see that the defense authorization bills in 2007 and 2008 reduced funding for some of the missile defense programs, and put more emphasis on ensuring success with the nearest-term programs, even though they did not cut as deeply as I would have liked.

What's your level of confidence in the GMD system?

I have no significant level of confidence in it. GMD is giving people a false sense of security since it has not been tested in realistic conditions—there hasn't been a single test with realistic operational conditions using the operational configuration of the GMD system. Even if there was a single successful test along those lines, it wouldn't be enough to give me confidence in the system based on the past failures.

It seems to make little sense to go ahead with the deployment of interceptors in Europe when the interceptors have not been shown to work. That plan has only served to upset Russia and other countries.

You have been frustrated in the past with what you describe as over-classification of data regarding missile defense. Have you seen any improvement in this area?

No. The Pentagon won't let analysts look at a lot of data that used to be releasable. I think that they got tired of listening to critiques and reports and things not going well, so they pulled up the blankets.

Is over-classification an issue with military space programs as well?

I haven't had as much time to look into those issues. I'd like to do so. But in general, the Pentagon tends to over-classify information.